

20 January 1955

STAT

[redacted]
London Bureau, FBIS
c/o American Embassy
London W.1, England

Subject: Forthcoming Joint Coordination Committee Meeting.

Dear Roland:

In preparation for the 16 March meeting of the Joint Coordination Committee, I have asked for some observations on those BBC MS activities which are worthy of special appreciation; and also for those factors of the BBC MS operation which should be commented on as less than satisfactory. I think that the attached is a fairly good statement (it needs rewording for inclusion in the minutes, of course), but I would like to have your comments on it together with any other information you may care to give me.

I fully expect that the major part of the meeting will be devoted to a consideration of how and where we may pick up what the BBC is going to be forced to drop. [redacted] was told during his visit last summer that the cut in BBC MS funds might be as high as 25 percent of their current fiscal year budget. If you could tactfully determine, more exactly, the extent of the BBC MS cut in funds, it would be helpful to us in planning. In the absence of such information, we are giving study to various methods and plans, some of which may go beyond the requirement at this time.

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I am deeply concerned over the suggestion that Reuters may be holding up the BBC MS on the DPA service. We could, of course, over DPA quite thoroughly at Frankfurt but it is confirmation of our worse fears that the TASS Hellschreiber service established a very bad precedent for Reuters extracting money from the BBC MS.

Please note the control stamp on this letter and its attachment. I suggest that both be destroyed after you have read them.

Sincerely,

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[redacted]
Chief, FBIS

AMW:jmb
0 & 1 - Add; 1 - BBC File; 1-AMW; 1 - Exec

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Chief, FBID

DATE: 19 January 1955

FROM : Chief, Radio Propaganda Branch

SUBJECT: Notes on BBC Services to FBIS

1. The FBIS, relying on the BBC MS for a major portion of its coverage including the most important segment of all, the Soviet Home and European Services, has for the most part been able to ignore the possibility of coverage problems in this area, confident that BBC's performance will continue to meet FBIS requirements and in some cases provide a standard for FBIS emulation. Among the many gratuitous courtesies which BBC's hospitality provides, a particularly noteworthy one has been the use of its reference facilities; the reference staff has rendered especially valuable research assistance since the establishment of the FBIS Bureau's Analysis Section.

2. The gap between the FBIS requirement for verbatim versions of important broadcast material and the BBC practice of summarizing or excerpting--a difference arising from the diverse orientation of the two services toward news-gathering on the one hand and intelligence collection on the other--has largely been bridged by BBC's acceptance of FBIS' requirements. In the future, however, this requirement is likely to be more onerous before it is less, and extended for example to the speeches of secondary Orbit leaders and to editorials in the Party organs of all Orbit countries.

3. It is suggested that inclusion in the regular course of a new monitor's orientation of a review of the FBIS Bureau's operation and briefings by its chief editor and chief analyst would be helpful in getting a clear idea of FBIS' peculiar requirements implanted in the minds of those who must ultimately fulfill them.

4. The most serious complaint about BBC services to FBIS remains the quality of the Russian language team. It has been reported that the team is headed by an Italian, that only about ten percent of its members are Great Russians, that few of them are adequate linguistically and none in political sophistication or interest in Soviet affairs. This may be an overstatement, but it is true that the incidence of incorrect or imprecise translation, of failure to note important subtleties, and of ill-advised excerpting over the past two years has made it no longer possible for U.S. analysts to do close work on BBC materials from the Russian until they are confirmed from other sources. A vigorous recruiting program and competitive compensation is recommended.

5. The Bulgarian, Rumanian, and Arabic language teams are reported to be similarly poor. Perhaps their work could be transferred to Kyrenia.

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Some Observations on the BBC Personnel, Efficiency and Related Factors Affecting RPB Operations.

A. The Problem of Texting Key Material.

1. The basic problem, I believe, is that the relatively small British intelligence community exercises little, if any, control over monitoring and displays little interest. Thus, the monitoring service is being used primarily as a news service.

2. This basic fact is at the root of most of our other problems in relations with BBC. There is no demand for verbatim textings of anything but the very key documents such as diplomatic notes. Malenkov and Khrushchev speeches have been summarized in BBC publications.

3. Inasmuch as there is no requirement for texting of key speeches or important material from the British, the individual monitor normally processes a speech or important document in two steps: first, he produces a "flash" version for the news bureau, and second, he produces an excerpted or summarized version for BBC editorial. This means that if FBIS requires a more expanded or textual version of the item, the monitor is involved in a third operation.

4. We have tried to surmount this problem by issuing the listening room a set of leaders names whose speeches and statements we would require textual versions. We have purposely made this list very small and select, however, in order to get our foot into the door. It still does not cover all leader speeches and it does not cover Pravda editorials or the editorials in the Satellite press.

5. Our blanket request for textings of certain items regardless of content has already resulted in some reverberations in the listening room which has come to nickname us the "foreign broadcast amplification service." Certain monitors regard our blanket requests for text and our amplification requests as a reflection on their journalistic status and abilities.

6. Another related factor is that monitors are often unaware of FBIS requirements because of the rather blurred instructions passed down to them from above. I have personally spoken to senior monitors who did not know that we produced a daily commentary list of Moscow broadcasts. This problem is all the more significant with regard to new monitors.

7. In view of the above, I think the following points could be made to HMS:

- a. His monitors should be made aware that our requests for amplifications and texts are not reflections on their ability.

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b. Our Chief Analyst and Chief Editor should orient all new monitors in FBIS requirements as part of their general orientation program.

8. I also personally feel that our requests for amplifications and texts could be made more fruitful and effective if we stopped requesting amplifications of those marginal items necessary for the commentary lists and rather increased our requests for expanded versions of speeches, editorials, and other key material.

B. Efficiency

1. The Russian monitoring team is one of the weakest in the monitoring service. Considering its size and importance, I would say it is the most weak. Ethnically, it is not even "Russian." Of more than 20 members, only some two or three are Great Russian. The rest are Balts, Poles, Persians, Ukrainians, etc. The team leader is an Italian named Arnaldi. This makes for generally acknowledged linguistic problems and for a low standard of translation.

Politically, this team is even weaker. Although there are isolated members of virtually every other BBC team who are relatively sophisticated in politics and in the internal affairs of their own countries, one would be hard pressed to find any members of the Russian team who have any insights into or taken any interest in Soviet affairs. Those members who did have now moved onto better jobs.

Although there is a general awareness that the Russian team is plainly inadequate, there does not appear to be any radical recruiting programs in mind. One of the senior Russian monitors told me before I left that of the three new Russian monitors, one knew English but not Russian, one knew Russian but not English and the third knew neither one.

Given the present Russian team, I cannot foresee any marked improvement in the quality of translations or the acuteness of selection. I believe that the Russian team is very plainly inadequate given the needs of the American intelligence community.

2. Of the other Cominform teams, the Czechs, Poles and Hungarians can be relied on, I believe, so far as selection is concerned although the Czech team is the only really "strong" team. The Rumanian team is hopeless and the Bulgarian is poor. I don't think either can be relied on and would prefer to see Cyprus assume as much coverage of this material as possible.

3. Although I did not have as much contact with the other language teams, I think the following is generally characteristic:

a. The German team is capable but slow and largely disinterested. Often there is a tremendous time lag between actual broadcast time and the time when our editors get German material.

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b. The Arabic team is very bad.

c. The Western European teams are fair although there is a fairly high turnover problem here.

C. "Nice Things to Say" Department.

1. By and large, I think the EBC senior assistants have tried to deal fairly and quickly with our amplification requests and individual monitors have been very good in redoing the work of colleagues which has been inadequate for our purposes.

2. I don't think the relations between FBIS and the monitors are as bad as they might be under the circumstances, largely because some of us maintained close and personal relationships with individual monitors. The last FBIS party was held exclusively for the monitors and was quite a success. I don't think it would be wrong therefore to say that our respective personnel get on well together personally.

3. The EBC library staff should be particularly congratulated for rendering very valuable research assistance to our analysis section which often went beyond its own needs. It is extremely efficient and one of the few elements in the whole operation which I personally shall long for.

4. In general, monitors and editors who are knowledgeable about conditions in their respective countries are very cooperative in answering numerous questions which the editors and analysts put to them.



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